

## **Interview with Aunt Harriet Smith, Hempstead, Texas, 1941**

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John Henry Faulk: I remember a long time ago you told me about during the big break up, the soldiers came by and uh, riding horseback. And you all were sitting on the fence, you children. Can you remember that?

Harriet Smith: Yeah.

John Henry Faulk: Lean this way just a little bit and tell about it.

Harriet Smith: Yes, I remember, that's, the, the, just, sit there, sat all day and look at them. They play the prettiest, prettiest music you ever heard in your life. And the soldiers would, you know. And them horses, they'd sing, you know. And them horses dart and follow the music just like that.

John Henry Faulk: Well I'll declare. Had them trained.

Harriet Smith: Yeah, had them trained.

John Henry Faulk: Well what about this girl you told me about there one time.

Harriet Smith: Well, N. P. was the one that uh, belonged to Mrs. P., the one that our white folk's neighbors. And she got her arm ground off in molasses mill, feeding molasses mill.

John Henry Faulk: How was that? How do you mean feeding a molasses mill?

Harriet Smith: Putting that cane in there for it to grind out to make molasses.

John Henry Faulk: Oh yeah. Ground out juice, uh huh.

Harriet Smith: Yeah, juice. They had them wooden, what you call things, you know, mash the cane with them.

John Henry Faulk: And they hitch a mule to it wouldn't they?

Harriet Smith: Yes.

John Henry Faulk: And he'd walk in a circle.

Harriet Smith: Yes sir, yes. He'd walk in a circle.

John Henry Faulk: Kind of like a hay baler? *[John Henry Faulk and Harriet Smith overlap]*

Harriet Smith: It have a, it have, it have a lever to it, you know, and go around and around.

John Henry Faulk: Uh huh.

Harriet Smith: We've made molasses that way. I've made molasses myself.

John Henry Faulk: You have. Well, now this girl got her arm ground off in molasses, uh, mill.

Harriet Smith: Yes, feeding the molasses mill, uh huh. That was the, that was the neighbor girl.  
*[mumbles]*

John Henry Faulk: Well how old was she?

Harriet Smith: Oh, she was a great big girl. She was about, big enough to feed the mill. About ten or twelve years old I reckon. Maybe that old, maybe even a little older than that. The neighbors had a molasses mill, the P.'s. She made molasses for everybody nearly. That girl had that mill to feed. Cane, would have cane you know, great big piles, piled up. She had to reach down and get that and put it in between them cork grinders and let it grind out and when that grind out, she'd pick up another handful and put in there.

John Henry Faulk: Well did they have good doctors for them in those days? Was, when it ground off her arm what did they do? How did they get her out? *[John Henry Faulk and Harriet Smith overlap]*

Harriet Smith: I don't, I don't know. I guess they carried her to *[unintelligible]*. I, I remember Dr. M., and, and uh, Dr. C. I remember them.

John Henry Faulk: Well, when the soldiers came by what, where, where was she?

Harriet Smith: Who M.?

John Henry Faulk: Uh huh.

Harriet Smith: She was on the other side. She lived the other side of us. She was living, she was living with our white folk. But this road went right along by our white people's house. I can go right today where I was born there. And they was coming right along by the house and they'd all day for weeks at the time. Them soldiers was traveling going south to San Antonio. *[mumbles]* We children stand on the fence and looked at them. Oh they had the prettiest horses you most ever saw.

John Henry Faulk: Well now what, what did those girls, what would this girl M. do.

Harriet Smith: M. P.?

John Henry Faulk: Uh huh.

Harriet Smith: Well she, she fed the mill. She *[John Henry Faulk interrupts]*

John Henry Faulk: Well I mean though when, when the soldiers came by.

Harriet Smith: Why, she's on the fence there with us looking at them. She lived right across from us you know, and that was the road and she *[John Henry Faulk interrupts]*

John Henry Faulk: Well I thought she went off with a soldier or something.

Harriet Smith: She did. She went off with a soldier. Soldiers come along, we all setting on the fence, and uh, or standing at the fence, setting and a colored soldier come along and ask her did she want to go with him and she said yes. And she mounted one of them horses and *[John Henry Faulk interrupts]*

John Henry Faulk: Right behind him huh?

Harriet Smith: Uh, uh, no, rode a horse to herself.

John Henry Faulk: Is that right?

Harriet Smith: That's right. We could ride horses. We could jump on them horses saddle sometime, ride them sometime. We learn how to do, I could stand flat-footed on the ground, jump on a horse sideways.

John Henry Faulk: Is that right?

Harriet Smith: That's right, yeah.

John Henry Faulk: Well you were a rider.

Harriet Smith: Yes. All of us, all of we all was raised to ride horses. Pa had horses of his own, chickens of his own.

John Henry Faulk: Well now what happened to M. P. after she and this soldier [*Harriet Smith interrupts*]

Harriet Smith: I, she went on with him. I never did see her and hear tell of her no more. She was going toward San Antonio.

John Henry Faulk: Going towards San Antonio.

Harriet Smith: Yes. She rode on with them down there.

John Henry Faulk: Well, what did she do? She didn't even tell her mama she was going or anything, huh?

Harriet Smith: She didn't have any mother.

John Henry Faulk: Oh, I see.

Harriet Smith: Yeah.

John Henry Faulk: And it's all, she'd already been freed hadn't she?

Harriet Smith: Yes, yes. That was the time the soldiers was going back you know after the freedom, back. And she'd always come over to our house and stay with us and play around. And she got on that horse and left that day. [*John Henry Faulk interrupts*]

John Henry Faulk: Well, can you remember the times right after the, after the big break up very well? Do you remember were times pretty hard then?

Harriet Smith: Yes. Times was hard. We worked and our white folks wasn't mean to their colored people. They was different from, there was seven brothers of them. Old man S. B., and J. B., and B. B. And they had one more B., that was name Kentucky Joe and so on. Whole passel of them. Seven brothers of them, I know. Some of them lived at Cedar Creek. Ma knowed them all and grandma knowed [*John Henry Faulk interrupts*]

John Henry Faulk: Well what did you all do after the big break up? Did you all leave the place?

Harriet Smith: No. We stayed on the place, and rented on the half.

John Henry Faulk: Oh rented on the half [*Harriet Smith interrupts*]

Harriet Smith: Yes. All, all our white folks was dead. And the overseer was old uh, B., Tom, Ira B.

John Henry Faulk: Ira B.

Harriet Smith: At Mountain City. That was our uh, uh, over, overseer over the place there, you know.

John Henry Faulk: And y'all rented on the halves.

Harriet Smith: Rented on the halves till we bought our home across the creek.

John Henry Faulk: Oh you bought your home. About how long after the big break up did you all buy your home?

Harriet Smith: Oh, I didn't buy. We didn't buy. Pa bought the home from old R., across the creek. And he stayed down there. And I used to stay with Aunt Rose and Uncle George. They was old folks, had no children, you know. They used to get me to come stay with them. And when I married they give me a home on the place.

John Henry Faulk: Well were they white folks?

Harriet Smith: No, colored folks.

John Henry Faulk: Oh, colored folks. Well, how old were you when you married?

Harriet Smith: I don't know, about seventeen, eighteen years old. Well maybe not that old. I didn't know my age. But ma and them knew. They didn't tell us though. We just guessed at it.

John Henry Faulk: Who did you marry?

Harriet Smith: J. S.

John Henry Faulk: J. S. Had he been a, had he, had he been a, a slave?

Harriet Smith: Oh yes. He was a slave. After the break up they sent him, he come from Blanco and bought a home over across the creek where we bought homes, adjoining our home. His father and mother did, you know. *[mumbles]*

John Henry Faulk: Uh, well, he, he had been freed then, I guess, the, uh, same time you had.

Harriet Smith: Oh yes, yes. They lived at Blanco. They bought them a home over in the colony. R. had sold the colored people all the homes there. I don't know.

John Henry Faulk: Who was R.?

Harriet Smith: A white man name R. lived right down the hill from us. They sold P. B. a home, and uh, pa had a home, Uncle Dave a home. All, all of them just all of them *[John Henry Faulk interrupts]*

John Henry Faulk: Well I declare. Uh, that was right after the big break up was it, uh?

Harriet Smith: Mmmm. About two, three years after the break up.

John Henry Faulk: Huh, and you just had a colony of, uh, colored folks?

Harriet Smith: Yes, that colony, where we, where I come from, has got homes out there. At Buellah they call it now. It wasn't nothing but woods when we bought it.

John Henry Faulk: And they call it Buellah now?

Harriet Smith: Yes.

John Henry Faulk: Oh I know where Buellah is.

Harriet Smith: Yes, yes, yes *[mumbles]*.

John Henry Faulk: Did you know Mr. T. in those days?

Harriet Smith: I reckon I did know Mr. T.

John Henry Faulk: Huh. What was he *[Harriet Smith interrupts]*

Harriet Smith: He was a deputy sheriff there for a while.

John Henry Faulk:Is that right?

Harriet Smith: Yes sir. He was a mighty fine man too, that's right.

John Henry Faulk:Yeah, he sure is.

**END OF SIDE B**